

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2006

The Honorable Robert Bennett
The Honorable Herb Kohl
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development and Related Agencies
Senate Dirksen 188
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bennett and Ranking Member Kohl:

We are writing to urge you to provide funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program for schools in the fiscal year 2007 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

The Fruit and Vegetable Program was first initiated as a four-state pilot in the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act. Encouraged by the initial success of the pilot program, Congress, in Section 120 of Public Law 108-265, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization of 2004, converted the pilot into a full program, expanding it to an additional four states and authorizing such appropriations as might be available and necessary to enable additional states to participate. The program was expanded to an additional six states last year through the fiscal year 2006 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Although the program currently serves only a small portion of the schools and states that wish to participate in it, we believe that it plays an important role in promoting sound nutrition and that the expansion of the program can help to prevent diet-related chronic disease and provide an effective means to improve the diets of American children. School officials at the limited number of schools currently participating in the program report broad satisfaction with it and also confirm that children's eating habits at school and at home have improved due to their participation in the program.

Poor diets and lack of fruit and vegetable consumption are well-documented among American children. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, only two percent of school-aged children meet the dietary recommendations for all five food groups. In addition, only fourteen percent of children meet the recommended levels for fruit consumption and only twenty percent for vegetables. These numbers are particularly alarming given all that is known about the health benefits of fruit and vegetable consumption. Studies have shown that fruit and vegetable consumption plays a role in the prevention of many chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes, among others.

Unfortunately, at current funding levels, the Fruit and Vegetable Program can only serve a small fraction of our nation's children in just a limited number of states. While we recognize

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that the current federal fiscal situation would make it difficult to expand the program to all children and schools, we do believe that a substantial investment in the program for fiscal year 2007 will improve the health of our nation's children.

Currently, eight states and three Indian reservations participate in the Fruit and Vegetable Program through nine million dollars in permanent funding provided through the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. An appropriation of \$42 million would enable USDA to continue to fund the six states which entered the Fruit and Vegetable Program as a result of the fiscal year 2006 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, as well as extend the program to each of the 36 states that are not currently able to participate in the program due to funding limitations. Accordingly, we hope you will be able to include this amount or very nearly this amount for the Fruit and Vegetable Program in the fiscal year 2007 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

We appreciate your consideration of our request. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Derek Miller of the minority staff of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry or Staci Lancaster in Senator Crapo's office.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin

ROB

Mike DeWine

Myra Thompson

Ch. Stenholm

Pat Leahy

Mike Crapo

John Thune

Elizabeth Dole

Rick Santorum

George V. Voinovich

Mike Lugar

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